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New York

President:	Mr. Quinlan	(Australia)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Gasana
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Developments in the region remain profoundly troubling, and the Security Council was briefed yesterday by the Secretary-General on the situation in Syria. As those events have already been well covered this month, my briefing today will continue to focus on efforts for renewed peace prospects in the Middle East, which should not be neglected, even against the background of turmoil elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

The resumption on 29 July of direct negotiations with the agreed objective of achieving a peaceful, comprehensive settlement on all final status issues within a nine-month time frame has been widely welcomed. As indicated by Under-Secretary-General Feltman in his horizon briefing on 4 September, the Secretary-General returned from the region encouraged by what he deemed to be a demonstrable seriousness by both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu to resume direct talks, despite skepticism from their domestic bases, as the only viable path through which a two-State solution may still be achieved.

In a sign of support for the bold decision taken by the leaders, regional and international partners pursued their diplomatic engagement with the parties. United States Secretary of State Kerry, credited for the renewed momentum, met with President Abbas on 8 September in London and Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 September in Jerusalem. He also continued his regular consultations with members of the Arab League Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee in Paris, as the region's engagement on a solution is vital. On 26 August, Foreign Minister Fahmy visited Ramallah, signalling Egypt's commitment to a comprehensive peaceful settlement to the conflict. The Quartet has lent its full backing to that political initiative, and principals and envoys are scheduled to meet next week.

The negotiating teams have been engaged in several rounds of talks, and we encourage both sides to accelerate and intensify their discussions. It is perhaps understandable that the skeptics continue to question the substance of the talks. However, at this stage, public comments would be counterproductive, and the parties' commitment to not revealing the contents of their sensitive negotiations should be respected as a signal of their resolve to overcome the deep divisions that exist on key issues. There are formidable challenges ahead and they cannot be underestimated.

The international community has long supported the vision of a two-State solution and now has a responsibility to give efforts towards that end a chance. But the onus to sustain an enabling environment lies with the parties. Both should refrain from actions that risk undermining the prospects of negotiations. And we urge them to act responsibly and with restraint. Concurrently, any substantial political initiative must yield early dividends in the immediate period ahead, with tangible improvements to security and socioeconomic conditions for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In that context, we welcome the decision taken on 8 September by the Israeli Government to increase the number of work permits for West Bank Palestinians by 5,000 to a total of 50,000. Noteworthy too is the agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian agriculture ministries to revive some of the joint committees first formed in the 1990s under the Oslo Accords. We look forward to further such steps that would increase Palestinian and Israeli economic cooperation, ease restrictions on access and movement of Palestinians, and lead to tangible improvements on the ground in both the West Bank and Gaza. In that regard, we hope ongoing discussions will soon produce results.

The foregoing are issues we shall also address in next week's ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), which comes at a more hopeful time. The meeting is expected to discuss a Palestinian economic initiative, developed in close consultation with Quartet Representative Blair and

United States experts, that should mutually reinforce and complement the political track. The United Nations report to the AHLC highlights steps towards expanding Palestinian economic activity, including in Area C, to improve the lives of Palestinians and increase revenue through taxation for the Palestinian Authority. In the short to medium terms, donors must continue to provide timely and predictable direct budget support.

However, as also highlighted in the reports of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, all socioeconomic trends indicate that the status quo is not sustainable absent real political progress, pointing to dire consequences for Israelis and Palestinians alike. We sincerely hope that the resumption of negotiations marks the beginning of closing the gap, renewing hope for a final status agreement in which Palestinians can realize their rightful aspirations for an independent and viable Palestinian State, and Israelis can meet their legitimate security needs and become a full partner in the development of a stable and prosperous Middle East. Another opportunity may not present itself soon.

Stability in the West Bank is all the more critical as talks are ongoing, and parties should exert all efforts to avoid violence. Israeli security forces carried out some 282 operations, during which five Palestinians died in Jenin and Qalandia refugee camps on 20 and 26 August, respectively. We strongly deplore those losses of life, including of one employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Additional clashes took place in early September in the vicinity of refugee camps, as well as at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis. Demonstrations, including against the barrier, also continued, resulting in 32 Palestinian injuries. A total of 169 Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces during this period, including 26 children and six women, while 339 Palestinians were arrested. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported tens of instances of rock and firebomb throwing by Palestinians at Israeli forces, during which five Israeli soldiers were injured.

Israeli security forces announced on 1 September the arrest of two Palestinians of East Jerusalem suspected of planning an explosive attack at a popular mall in West Jerusalem during the Jewish holidays. Their indictment suggests that the terrorist attack was at an advanced stage. The IDF also announced the arrest of a total of 24 Palestinian terror suspects on 2 and 4 September, and the confiscation of weapons, explosives and military equipment. Palestinian security forces, continuing to work to maintain security in the West Bank, defused a total of 23 unexploded devices.

Settlement activity continued in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The construction of settlements is counterproductive and against international law. Clashes between Palestinians and settlers also continued, and reports of settler attacks against Palestinian farmers, including arson of olive trees near Nablus on 11 September, are particularly worrisome as we enter the olive-picking season.

We are monitoring with concern increased tensions in the Old City of Jerusalem, which resulted in clashes with Palestinian worshippers, injuries, arrests and restrictions imposed on Palestinian access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound. Incitement, provocation and violent actions must cease and the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths must be respected.

A total of 33 residential structures were demolished, including of the Bedouin community of Tel al-Adassa in East Jerusalem, leading to the displacement of 176 Palestinians, including 78 children. The ongoing practice of demolishing Palestinian structures that do not have an Israeli-issued permit only highlights the need for Israel to address the urgent housing and development needs of Palestinian communities in Area C and East Jerusalem. Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime so as not to resort to the building of structures without an Israeli permit, which leads to demolitions. We urge Israel to find a sustainable solution for the Tel al-Adassa Bedouins, most of whom have crossed the barrier into Area C in search of new grazing lands for their herds.

The calm in Gaza was mostly sustained. Two rockets exploded at their launching sites and seven rockets dropped short, landing inside of Gaza and putting its population at risk. Three Palestinian civilians were reportedly injured by Israeli fire on 20 and 30 August while approaching the border area in the north of Gaza. Israeli forces conducted five limited incursions into Gaza, and three improvised explosive devices were detonated during their patrols in the border area. The Israeli navy reportedly fired warning shots at the vicinity of Palestinian fishing boats on several occasions, citing security concerns. There were also reports of the Egyptian navy intercepting Palestinian fishing boats in Egyptian territorial waters. Allegedly, five fishermen were arrested, two of whom were injured.

Earlier this month, I met with the Egyptian leadership in Cairo, who ascribed great importance to progress in the peace process. The situation in Gaza was central to our discussions. Egypt has intensified military operations in northern Sinai, which included the continued closing of smuggling tunnels. Here, let me condemn the attacks in Rafah on 11 and 16 September, when six Egyptian security personnel were reported killed and 20 injured. Egyptian authorities have today announced that Rafah will be reopened for special cases.

While we fully recognize Egypt's legitimate security concerns and the need to effectively counter illegal activities in the Sinai and around Gaza, including smuggling via tunnels, we are particularly attentive to the potential humanitarian impact on Gaza. As a result of shortages of fuel, the Gaza power plant shut one of three generating turbines. The deficit of around 40 per cent of required electricity in Gaza could adversely impact other essential services, including water, sanitation and health. We continue to work with all concerned parties to ease the humanitarian pressures on Gaza and further increase access through legal crossings into Gaza, in particular of construction materials, fully taking into account legitimate security concerns and previous agreements.

The Gaza Strip remains a high priority for the United Nations, and we welcome the approval of another package of United Nations construction works involving what are still classified as dual-use materials. United Nations construction work in Gaza includes almost 3,000 housing units, 67 schools, eight health clinics, 31 water- and 10 electricity-related structures, and road habilitation, totaling some $450 million.

On 27 August, a military court in Gaza sentenced two men to death, one on charges of collaborating with Israel and the other for multiple homicides. No dates for the executions were set. I recall High Commissioner Navi Pillay's position on death sentences in Gaza, as well as her concern about ill-treatment and torture during interrogations of persons later sentenced to death.

Turning to Lebanon, there was a further devastating attack on 23 August, when two car bombs exploded outside mosques in the city of Tripoli, killing at least 45 people and injuring more than 200 others. Three Lebanese men and a Syrian were charged in connection with the attack. The Secretary-General strongly condemned the bombings and called for calm and unity in Lebanon. The Lebanese army and security forces intensified security measures across the country.

There was further cross-border fire from Syria into Lebanon, which caused material damage but no casualties. President Sleiman repeated his calls on all Lebanese parties to disassociate themselves from the conflict in Syria and to respect the Baabda Declaration. Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam continued his consultations to form a new government.

On 22 August, four rockets were fired from the area of Tyre in southern Lebanon towards Israel, including two that landed in Israeli communities. The Abdallah Azzam Brigade claimed responsibility for the launch. The Lebanese authorities condemned the attack and have now detained two suspects. The Israel Defense Forces carried out a retaliatory strike on 23 August in the area of Naameh, south of Beirut. The Secretary-General urged all concerned to fully adhere to resolution 1701 (2006), cooperate with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and respect the cessation of hostilities.

On the Golan, the security situation remains volatile, with heavy clashes between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and armed members of the opposition continuing inside the area of separation. The military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and jeopardize the ceasefire. On 12 September, during heavy clashes between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and armed members of the opposition near United Nations observation post 54, five artillery shells and one tank shell landed on the Alpha side. There was no retaliation from the Israel Defense Forces.

In conclusion, last week marked 20 years since the signing of the Oslo accords. Twenty years of endless negotiations, prolonged occupation, terror and conflict have deeply affected perceptions and expectations within both Israeli and Palestinian societies and undermined the belief that peace is possible, even if the majority still favours a two-State solution. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead or the momentous efforts required to sustain and successfully conclude negotiations within the prescribed time frame.

And yet, 20 years of peace efforts have also demonstrated that fair, reasonable and legitimate solutions can be found for the key issues dividing the

parties. It is for the negotiators to identify and narrow these gaps, and for their leaders to take decisions in the best interest of their peoples. And the international community, including key regional stakeholders, must now show unity and resolve in assisting the parties in moving forward. The Secretary-General therefore looks forward to productive meetings of the AHLC and the Quartet this month, as well as to a constructive debate during this year's General Assembly.

Words are critical in preparing the ground for peace. Both leaders are soon to address the General Assembly, and we sincerely hope that they will take the opportunity to reach out to each other's people in making the case for peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.